

July 2015

Greetings!

I hope everyone is having a joyful and peaceful summer. It was a very busy spring for me. I went back east for a wedding of a friend, which was quite beautiful. Also I was able to stay with my family for a while and met with many friends. It was a great trip, but very tiring. Just recently, a good friend came up to Seattle for a visit, which was very nice.

The groups in Seattle are going very well, and although some are quite small, they are very dedicated to the meditation and training. We also had a very enjoyable family get together in June, and plan to meet again in September.

In this email, I would like to put our series on "The Egocentric Self" on hold and talk about something I came across that was very impactful for me.

About a month ago, I was listening to public radio and they had a show on Bill Wilson, the co-founder of Alcoholics Anonymous, which talked about how he came to start this group. He had been a very successful broker on Wall Street, and was also a very serious alcoholic. After trying many cures, none of which worked, he found himself in the hospital. In utter despair, he cried out "If there be a God, will He show Himself." He then had a deep religious (spiritual) experience. From that point on, he never drank again and vowed to help others. This struck a chord with me, as many years ago, when I was at a very low point in my life, I actually yelled for help. What came up for me was to learn to meditate, then Zen meditation, and then to travel to California to train with Reverend Master Jiyu Kennett. It is said that all calls for help are answered. It seems to me that they are answered in many different ways, and most times not the ways we were expecting.

Years after his religious experience, Bill Wilson wrote a letter to Dr. Carl Jung, a famous Swiss psychiatrist and psychotherapist, referring to an acquaintance, Roland H., who had sought Dr. Jung's help with severe alcoholism. After about a year, Dr. Jung said he could not help him, but told him that a religious practice which could lead to a spiritual conversion (religious experience) might help. He said that he knew of some cases where this worked, but it was rare. In Roland H.'s case, he joined a religious group and had a spiritual experience and never drank again. I can see how this would be a rare occurrence, because I believe the difficulty involved is great. In my experience, I have found that few stick with the training and meditation, citing how difficult it is. My

approach is that in life, the things that really help and are worthwhile are difficult. As one Master said, once you start and do this meditation and training, you are already in the "Stream of Enlightenment", and you don't necessarily need a major religious experience, even though it may be helpful. I am one of many who have never had a major religious experience, but like many others, I have had moments, which another master has referred to as "the moments that make you dance."

The idea of spirituality helping people in many ways is something that I am familiar with. In the last few years, I have had people come to the groups who are affiliated with Alcoholics Anonymous, Narcotics Anonymous, and Pills Anonymous. They all told me that the foundation and backbone of their teachings was to take refuge in a "Higher Source." This is very much a basis of the Soto Zen practice that I do.

Back to Bill Wilson again. Dr. Jung responded to his letter with a beautiful return letter. Both these letters can be found on the internet if anyone would like to look at them. In his letter, Dr. Jung said something that I would like to quote. He said, "Craving for alcohol was a spiritual thirst of our being for wholeness with the union of God." This is very much in line with the teaching of Shakyamuni, where he said that craving is the source of suffering, and the answer is Nirvana (the reunion with the love, compassion, and non-judgment of the Buddha Nature, the Unborn, the Eternal).

There is something that Bill Wilson refers to from a book that he read (William James' Varieties of Religious Experience) that applies to our previous discussions on the egocentric self. James says "A common denominator of spiritual experience and spiritual training is ego collapse in depth." In our series on the egocentric self, we instead refer to conversion of the ego, wherein we are mindful of the ego and it's tendencies to "take over", letting the Eternal flow through all aspects of the ego.

I was having difficulty ending this email until I remembered a poem that came up for me during a service on the day before I went into the hospital to have a tumor removed. Because of the variety of faiths of our readers, I am going to change Hand of "Buddha" to Hand of the "Lord."

ALWAYS!!

WE ARE ALWAYS IN THE HAND OF THE LORD

when we are young AND when we are old

when we are energetic AND when we are tired

when we are healthy AND when we are sick

when we are alive AND when we are dead

THE UNCONDITIONAL LOVE OF THE ETERNAL IS ALWAYS THERE. WE CAN ALWAYS TURN TO IT.

ALWAYS!!

We will continue in the next email with some more aspects of the ego, and I promise that eventually I will go over the Skandas, which are the actual components of the ego.

Have a great summer!

With all my heart,

Reverend Basil